



# Iowa Children's Justice

September 2011

## Judicial Leadership and Permanency for Iowa's Children

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### September Topic

### Iowa's Blue Print for Forever Families

The blueprint presents a framework for permanency efforts that is organized around five key areas:

- Family and youth engagement
- Family preservation
- placement and reunification
- adoption and guardianship, and
- transitioning to adulthood

Future ICJ newsletters will consider each of these areas within the context of court practice.

The Iowa Blueprint for Forever Families can be found at Iowa Children's Justice Webpage:  
[http://www.iowacourts.gov/Administration/Childrens\\_Justice/Childrens\\_Justice/index.asp](http://www.iowacourts.gov/Administration/Childrens_Justice/Childrens_Justice/index.asp)

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### Judicial leadership and the blueprint vision

*"Permanency is critical for the well being of the youth we serve not only to begin to resolve a current crisis, but to provide meaningful relationships that last a life time."*  
**Iowa Supreme Court Justice Brent Appel**

Judges are strong advocates for the children of Iowa. They play a critical role in assuring that the child welfare system is responsive to the child's need for permanence and help reinforce the need for system improvement. To enable the implementation of the "Iowa Blueprint for Forever Families," it is critical for courts to provide judicial oversight of permanency at **every** hearing and at each stage in the life of the case. The active role of judges makes the difference between permanency for a child or a child remaining in temporary foster care placement – lacking legal, relational and cultural permanency. When each juvenile court judge fulfills this oversight role by regularly asking questions about progress to permanency, they create an expectation of compliance for all parties and as a result contribute in a powerful way to practice improvement.

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### Principles of permanency

### Urgency

**Urgency:** Judges can be instrumental in creating the attitude and process of treating key decisions and progress toward permanency as if each child's welfare depended on it...because it does. Urgency is determination to stay focused on results and deadlines until permanency is achieved. Early in the life of the case, it is important for interveners to identify for the court the conditions necessary for safe case closure. This ensures that everyone involved has a clear and shared understanding of what changes must occur within the family so that parental functioning can adequately sustain safety and well-being for the child.

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## Principles of permanency

### Diversity

**Diversity:** Court hearings reflect respect for a child and family's culture, race, ethnicity, language, and religion and a focus on maintaining family connections. Recent federal legislation, Fostering Connections, is aimed at promoting permanency and improved outcomes for children in foster care through support for kinship care and family connections, and direct access to federal resources for Indian Tribes. (See Iowa Children's Justice Newsletter October, 2010)

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## Principles of permanency

### Family and Youth Empowerment

**Empowerment:** Engaging families and youth in a meaningful court process relies on a welcoming and helpful court environment and the family's or youth's active participation. Families are empowered during court hearings when their views and opinions are valued by the judge and they are asked about their unmet needs from the bench.

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## Principles of permanency

### Accountability

**Accountability:** The court oversight role to track and monitor progress is a significant contribution to accountability of the whole child welfare system. By the judge regularly asking questions from the bench, they can create an expectation that services and supports to the family are strength-based, fair, responsive, and effective. Questions that contribute to permanency principles include:

- Urgency: In this case, how will we know when we are done? What progress have we made to date in helping the child and family?
  - Timely and Appropriate Goal: Why is this permanency goal the most appropriate option for the child at this point in the case? How is this goal in the child's best interest? What other goals were considered and why were they ruled out? What is the concurrent goal? At review hearings, is this permanency goal still appropriate for this child? Are the circumstances that initially justified this permanency option still valid; e.g. are relatives now able to care for the child?
  - Evidence of Progress: What progress has been made toward permanency? What change has occurred in the family that will allow this child to return home?
  - Bottom Line: Why can't this child go home today?
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## Principles of permanency

### Shared Responsibility

Multiple systems (including child welfare, juvenile courts, education, substance abuse, mental health, domestic violence, and other) and the community at large can work together to identify and support permanent relationships for children. District Teams, under the leadership of the court, offers excellent opportunities for multi-systemic efforts to address true permanency for children.

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## For more information about the Blueprint

The Iowa Blueprint for Forever Families can be found at Iowa Children's Justice Webpage: [http://www.iowacourts.gov/Administration/Childrens\\_Justice/Childrens\\_Justice/index.asp](http://www.iowacourts.gov/Administration/Childrens_Justice/Childrens_Justice/index.asp)  
The Permanency Summit materials can be found at: [http://www.iowacourts.gov/Administration/Childrens\\_Justice/Childrens\\_Justice/Permanency\\_Summit/](http://www.iowacourts.gov/Administration/Childrens_Justice/Childrens_Justice/Permanency_Summit/)

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## For more information about Iowa Children's Justice

For more information about Children's Justice contact Gail Barber, Director, at [gail.barber@iowacourts.gov](mailto:gail.barber@iowacourts.gov).  
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